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THE CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

A Sermon

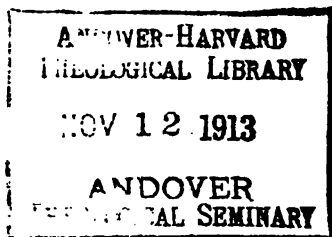
PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE
IN NEW YORK AT THE GENERAL CONVENTION OF
THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
OCTOBER 8, 1913

BY

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BISHOP OF MASSACHUSETTS

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THE CHALLENGE TO THE CHURCH

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."—1 John v: 4.

WHEN the General Convention of 1880, meeting in New York City, was about to dissolve, the Bishops, at the request of the House of Deputies, sent forth to the Church a message of which this paragraph was the dominant note: "We should endeavor to throw ourselves into the actual breathing world around us, and speak to the living present rather than to the dead past. We should seek to know the needs of our country, the tendencies, dangers, exigencies of our times, to what God calls us in His Providence, what traces of His guidance and direction we can discern in past history, and whither He points us now. What, then, is our position?"

That note which was struck in this city a short generation ago I want to strike now again as we enter upon our counsels.

First, may I ask you to contrast for a moment the change of conditions between that day and this.

The population of this country has leaped from fifty to one hundred millions: these millions composed of people of diverse tongues and races.

The wealth of the country has massed in gigantic proportions.

Tides of migration have swept over the world's surface: the darkest Africa of 1888 is shot through with light. Wars in the East and in Eastern Europe have changed the boundaries of nations. Japan and China, rising in their might, have tipped the balance of modern civilization towards the Pacific: and commerce through the Panama Canal will add its weight. The English language has spread throughout the world. This country is the great melting pot of civilizations and races.

Meanwhile the appliances of science, the telephone, the wireless, the motor, the creation of engines of vast power, are adding speed to the movement. In 1880 the first great wave of industrialism was at its crest; the building of factories, the sinking of mines, and the creation of wealth, cities and material resources were thought to be the making of nations. What the effect of this

industrialism was to be upon the physical and moral condition of the men, women and children toiling in the wheels was hardly thought of.

Recall also the beneficent discoveries in surgery and medicine, antiseptic surgery, the X-ray, the unrevealed power of radium. Scourges which desolated homes and peoples now checked or wiped out:—yellow fever, typhoid, lockjaw, diphtheria, tuberculosis, rabies, the bubonic plague, the hookworm and cholera.

Philosophy has moved from its utilitarian and materialistic atmosphere into one more ethical and spiritual, from an over-intellectualism to a fuller recognition of the meaning and value of personality. Men lift their heads with a fresher consciousness of power to control their destinies: religion claims its own.

Theology has taken on a more ethical and spiritual tone. Discoveries in geology, biology and history which shook the faith of thousands have come to the defense of the faith; and Biblical criticism, dreaded by timid souls a few years ago, has given fresh light and value to the Scriptures.

So short has this period of re-creation been that men who were in the Convention then are present now. These movements, exceeding in speed and power anything in history, demanding a readjustment and re-interpretation of the eternal truths of the Gospel, are a challenge to God's Church. They are not to be feared or evaded, but to be met and welcomed with exhilaration and confidence. We know now better than ever that the victory that overcometh the world is our faith.

“What then is our position?”

We are of Christ's Holy Catholic Church. With no claim of exclusive possession we stand for the Faith, the Scriptures, the Sacraments and the Ministry as we have received the same. In a country where English traditions, laws and stock are deeply embedded, we are children of the Church in which the English people were nurtured and from which they came. We therefore inherit those traditions which are incorporated into the traditions of this country: among them the spirit of nationalism and untrammelled patriotism. We owe no allegiance to foreign potentate, only to God

and our country. Wherever the flag goes, there goes the responsibility of this Church; no foot of land claimed by the United States that has not some officer of this Church responsible, so far as opportunity offers, for the welfare of its people. We stand for the independence of Church and State : therein is spiritual liberty and opportunity. The story of the bitterness and warfare between Church and State in countries of Europe these last years has again called forth our gratitude to the framers of our Constitution. No Church in this land can suffer through the official recognition of another Church, and no Church can bring temporary prosperity and its ultimate unhappiness or downthrow by claiming any special privilege or financial help of the State.

Laymen, representative of the Dioceses throughout this land, sit in our councils and have part with the Bishops and Clergy in all debate and action of administration, Canon, Constitution or doctrine. This is democratic, statesmanlike and apostolic.

This Convention, therefore, is representative of the Church. The thought sobers each one of us. Debate and action, every

word and vote has its weight. Every hour of the short session is of value.

There is a tendency among some people to belittle legislation and time spent in debate. We appreciate that there is danger of unwise legislation and of much debate on trivial or secondary subjects. New conditions, however, demand fresh legislation. Unless the stream of Church life be kept clear of the snags and barriers of archaic laws, it will be checked and bring disaster instead of refreshment. Faithful legislators will give of their best time and thought to all subjects, small and great.

In the amendment of Canons, in questions of Missionary administration, of courts, of the Prayer Book and special services, of theological education, and the adequate support and pension of the Clergy, this Convention has before it subjects upon which we have only too short a time for wise debate and action. There will, we believe, rise a fuller conception of the organic life of the Church in this country. From a loose federation of dioceses we are moving toward a clearer vision of a National Church.

Let me again quote from the Pastoral Letter of 1880: "To obtain acceptance, wide influence and moral power, our Church must have the confidence of the American people." "Such a Church must keep pace with intellectual progress; must be able to deal with the great moral and social problems of the day; to grapple with the assaults of infidelity; to meet successfully the skeptic upon his own ground; to shed light upon perplexing questions, to direct bewildered minds." "She must be, mind and heart, an American Church—not a fossilized relic of mediæval ages — large-hearted and alive to the pulsations around her, while firm in faith and unmovable from her foundation."

Supported by this message from the last generation, we may now take up a few of the larger subjects which lay behind our action. Without vision, legislators and statesmen, ecclesiastic and civil, become politicians and their counsels perish.

My purpose this morning is to consider one large and vital subject, and then suggest three visions that are floating before us all and beckoning us onward.

The large and vital subject is one that meets quick response from the people of this country—education.

Under the conditions of this Nation with the separation of Church and State, where does this Church stand in the subject of education? We believe that education includes the whole child, youth and man: that it involves his physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual nature. We believe in education in its largest, richest significance. What the boy learns in school is of great importance, but it is only a part of his education: lessons, influences, forces pour into him from every quarter. We believe that the source and spring of character which is the highest result of education is faith in God as revealed in Christ. Religion is at the foundation of education first, last and always: it gives vitality, depth and harmony to the whole character.

For such an education we believe that the American people of the twentieth century will stand.

But the question is asked from every quarter—how under our conditions of the separation of Church and State, with chil-

dren of all faiths and no faiths in the public and many of the private schools, can there be religious education? Let us face that question frankly; for one sometimes fears that there are good people who are afraid to meet the issue.

We must keep this point clear. Real religious education can be only through the guidance, instruction and leadership of religious men and women. The neglect of this truth has been the undoing of much so-called religious instruction. While, therefore, the State through her teachers may implant certain principles of morality, and may even teach the history of religion or the literature of religion, she cannot teach religion itself. So far as the teachers and scholars in our schools are religious and come from religious homes there will be an atmosphere of religion in the schoolroom. With, however, the variety of races, faiths and no faiths represented in the children of our public schools, we may put the thought of definite teaching of the Christian faith in the schools out of our minds. It cannot be done and it ought not to be attempted.

May it not be possible for the different

denominations to send religious teachers to the school-houses and at certain hours under a voluntary system give the children, separated according to sects, their religious education? The question may be raised as to whether the State has a right to give the use of its school-houses for denominational religious teaching. Is it well for children melted together in a common citizenship to be separated then and there into sectarian folds? Such an experiment, occasionally possible perhaps, cannot really meet the situation.

Shall we then turn our energies to the creation of parochial and other Church schools? We give high respect to those of the Roman Church, who, true to their convictions on this point, create church schools and pay for their administration in addition to their taxes for the public schools. And in our own and other Churches there are conditions where such schools are necessary and of great help. So long as the supporters of such schools do not import the outworn traditions of Europe and transgress the principles of this Nation by asking for the support of their schools from public funds, they

are doing a good though limited work for the country and their churches. Limited, however, that work must be in quality and quantity : in quality because children growing to manhood under one religious system and one roof must lack certain elements of thought and character essential to the largest citizenship ; in quantity because these schools can supply only a fraction of the education of the millions of youth in this country.

The fact is that the great mass of children in this country are going to receive their general education in the public schools or in private schools where there can be but little or no definite religious instruction or leadership. We as a people believe in the schools : we are supporting them and our children as a whole are going to them. This fact having sunk deeply into our minds we again ask the question, how can there be religious education ?

The children must get their definite religious education elsewhere than in the schools. Why not ? Why should we cling to the fetish that religion must be taught under the same roof or in the same room with geog-

raphy and arithmetic? Is not this common notion due largely to the fact that in other days children used to be so taught and that we are afraid we cannot get them taught at any other time or by other teachers? Just here is the weak point in our present frame of mind. We have not fully grasped the situation nor directed our thought and action along the path that must be taken.

If this country is to remain Christian, the people of the country must be shown how they can support our great and noble school system and at the same time bring up their children in the principles of Christian faith and character.

Turn your thoughts for a moment from children in the mass to one typical American child.

He is born of Christian parents; is baptized; is taught to pray, and is given the first principles of the Christ child life: in Sunday-school his teacher, alert, sympathetic, intelligent, so correlates his religious instruction with the studies of his day-school, with his social, athletic and thoughtful interests, that the spiritual culture enters into the very texture of his thought

and character. At home, in the day-school, on the playground, at church, on the street, religion is as natural and real as any other interest of his life because of the influences and atmosphere about him.

The youth is followed up into his high school or commercial activities by those who have a virile, intelligent and vital grasp of the faith, sympathetic with the turmoils of his doubts and passions. Can you doubt that when that boy enters manhood he will have gained such integrity of faith and character as no artificial or hot-house system could have offered him?

"True," is the answer; but this demands of parents, teachers and church more than we can hope or ask for. There is not the devotion, time or ability to do this. If there were, the ideal is right.

Just here we strike the root of the difficulty — timidity, indifference, laziness, or lack of faith. This, then, is what I want to say with all the conviction at my command, that it is along this path that the Church must move. The Church of this day and country, recognizing the conditions of the day and country, must marshal to

her service every instrumentality at hand—parents and the home, the press and literature, the playground, an hour of a week-day or Sunday, various forms of schools, correspondence, public worship, the pastoral work, the Parish, the Diocese, the Department—everything; and, in a large and statesmanlike way, plan for and press through not one system, but many systems, of religious education, yes, and spiritual culture, without apparent system, that will reach and upbuild all sorts and conditions of children in Christian faith and character.

Look where you will, there is no other course practical and consistent. It is along the natural habits of life ; it is spiritual ; it is free ; it creates strength as it goes ; it knits youth and maturity together in a consistent development; it creates such toughness of moral and spiritual fibre as may stand the strain of later years. And, what is often the test of truth, it makes the heaviest demand upon the whole Church, every member of it, for thought, enterprise and devotion.

May we follow this child up towards manhood? Taking this line of action with en-

thusiasm, patience and force, the Church will realize that as the youth leaves home for the wider circles of life, modern thought and literature will open up many questions as to the faith which must be met intelligently. Men and women should be near them able and ready "to shed light upon perplexing questions, to direct bewildered minds." The Christian people of this country, we of this Church, have not begun to awaken to the new conditions in the higher education of young men and women, or to thrust in spiritual forces where they are most needed and where they will do the most effective service in leadership.

Let me suggest two illustrations. A generation ago the endowed and denominational colleges and universities were the chief institutions of higher education in this country. They felt some responsibility for the religious life and thought of the students, although it was feebly expressed in many places. To-day the State Universities are growing apace: towards them as well as towards the other Universities the ambitions of the ablest young men and women of the country turn. The students

of this decade are, roughly speaking, to be the leaders of this land two decades hence. Here they are massed in groups of thousands. Do you know that the college student body has in the last twenty-two years increased from 60,000 to 200,000?

These young men and women are, most of them, from Christian homes, susceptible to religious influences, keen in a desire to do the best for themselves in the world, sensitive to truth, with faces looking not backward, but forward: they are meeting new thoughts and habits of life. Leadership, intellectual, moral and spiritual, they need and welcome. If religious literature is to reach them, it must be fresh, vigorous and thorough, wrought out by men who have thought deeply in theology and life. Has the Christian Church ever had a more inspiring challenge to high endeavor than this army of youth?

Again, there is perhaps no branch of public service in which the country takes more pride than in the personnel of its naval force. Its officers and men have intelligence, integrity of character and high purpose. They are, however, living under

artificial conditions and strict discipline, subject to peculiar temptations. It is due to these men and boys who are developing in character that the nation should offer them the best in moral and spiritual leadership and appoint such officers, be they chaplains or lay workers, as will draw the strongest religious leaders into the service. Does this nation know, do the Churches realize, that while in 1858, three years before the Civil War, there were 24 chaplains and 10,000 officers and men in the naval service, to-day there are over 50,000 officers and men and still the same number of 24 chaplains? Upon the Churches and the people, as well as upon the members of Congress, rests the responsibility for this neglect of the welfare of the men who are giving their lives in our naval service.

The educational ideal, therefore, that I want first to put before you is that of a Church so roused by the opportunities of spiritual leadership in our day and nation that she will equip herself in a statesman-like way with such intellectual, moral and spiritual forces as will meet childhood and youth, manhood and womanhood, and edu-

cate and lead them up into the highest realms of Christian character and service; inspiring them to dream dreams and see visions of nobler and greater things to come.

With this ideal of education before us other visions follow which beckon our thoughts out and beyond this nation and generation.

Given a people thus educated, there will rise before them, as there is rising dimly before us, three visions.

1. Are we not as a people conscious of an increasing longing for a closer brotherhood of men? The shrinkage of the world through rapid transit, commerce and literature, the sweeping waves of migration, the intermingling of peoples, have brought men together. Fresh interpretations of religions and a deeper knowledge of the Incarnation has led to a fuller realization of the organic unity of mankind.

No sooner have we felt the joy of this than we start appalled at the masses of the peoples of other races: is the world big enough for us all? Is there food enough? The instinct of self-preservation, race prejudice and antipathy, race timidity come to

the surface, and the animal in us wrestles with the spiritual. Nevertheless the ideal of brotherhood is insistent: literature, economy, statesmanship, philosophy and religion hail it, though from afar; while men tremble lest the firing of a chance shot may start a skirmish, a battle, a race war. It is a singular, a hazardous, a critical situation.

Where stands the Church of Christ? There can be but one answer. Recognizing to the full the race instinct, the antipathies, the intricacies and difficulties of the situation, the Church, aye, every Christian man and woman, stands firmly by the principle of St. Paul that God "hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth."

Nations and statesmen in their more exalted moments recognize this. Hence Christian Missions have justified themselves and confounded their critics. While Christian peoples have entered other nations for conquest, commerce, exploitation or travel, Christian missionaries have been quietly teaching, healing, comforting, helping and uplifting the people. They have gone not to get but to give. To the trader the

Chinaman is a trader; to the missionary the Chinaman is a brother. With the Christian faith always goes the sacredness of the individual, the integrity and the rights of man as man; hence civic freedom, self-government, democracy. With the blessings of Christian hope the missionary has taken also the blessings of civic freedom. And in return China, the Government of the Republic of China, asks for the prayers of the Christian people of America that God may guide her aright. Discount everything that the cynic may say, is not this beyond the wildest dream of faith or fanatic? Any man who has no use for missions is as much out of date as an old flint-lock gun. Life moves too rapidly in these days for us even to stop and look at him.

This country, absorbing peoples by the millions, has its enormous missionary problems and opportunities. Our first missionary work is to uphold Christian standards here. This can only be done by meeting also the people at their sources of supply in their native countries. If nations and races are to deal with each other, statesmen and people must have some common standards

and ideals that they may understand each other. We are as nations in spite of ourselves becoming mutually dependent. Who can guess what wealth of thought, art, character and religious temper the Oriental may not fling back to enrich our Occidental faith in an Oriental Saviour?

When, therefore, the Church plans for world-wide missions, she plans for the honor and spiritual wealth of this country as well as for the welfare of distant people. Men everywhere are discovering that the Saviour's command, "Go ye into all the world," has philosophy as well as religion in it. The greatest glory of the Church throughout the ages has been in the fact that in spite of timidity and cynicism her heroes have thrust her outposts to the ends of the world in the perfect confidence that this Faith is the Victory that overcometh the world.

2. This spirit of unification pressing during the past generation into every interest of life and thought has brought to the front another ideal of Christian faith which in the noble struggle of the Reformation for sacredness of the individual, the right of

private judgment, for civic and religious liberty has been pushed into the background.

So let me speak of the Unity of Christ's Church.

However men may define the term, whatever the form of their ideal, everyone dissatisfied with present conditions has before him, hazy, distant, but real, a hope for Unity. All deplore the wastefulness of division, the broken front before the common enemies of sin and paganism, the jealousies and bickerings of sectarianism; but the real sentiment for Unity runs deeper. Christ's children in village, city and nation should be praying, thinking and working in a spirit which being close to Christ should bring all to a closer unity. So keen is this sentiment that an immediate danger to unity comes not from the indifferentist so much as from the enthusiasts who through some mechanical device, contract or combination would harness all churches and Christians together; or would absorb them all into their own rigid fold. Church Unity must reckon not only with the Latin and Slav, as of old, but with the Teuton and Saxon, the Japanese,

the Chinese, the Indian and Christians of many races.

Until the warmth and glow of spring have come, it is worse than useless for skeleton trees and hardened buds to try and break forth into leaf and make the forest a harmony of color. The thought of Christian Unity is so sublime and full of mystery that except for a touch of action here or there upon the fringe, our chief work is to create an atmosphere.

Prayer for perfect Unity such as God, not we, may plan is perhaps the most effective service now. Even Christ at the very birth of the Church is found praying for it "that they may be one."

It is well also to appreciate such warmth of atmosphere as now exists. In the lives of the saints throughout the ages there is a common Christ; and in their presence the voice of division is hushed. Which of us asked whether Churchman, Methodist or Liberal wrote the hymns of this morning? Religious literature is not branded with sectarian initials. Beneath prayer and song, and work, too, there is a common Christianity within and behind the Churches, and

frankness in recognizing our differences reveals this the more clearly. When we join Christians of every name and no name in serving the community, healing the sick, lifting the downtrodden, bringing purity, righteousness and peace, when we are doing together the very works that Christ did, we are in a real and living unity, and are creating a rarer atmosphere through which in God's good time (we know not when or how, surely not as any of us think or plan) will come the Unity for which Christ prayed.

Two definite duties are ours : To live and work together in our own Church in the bond of peace ; and to keep our ideal of Unity so high and large and flexible that God's spirit may dwell in it.

3. A third vision stands before this generation, that of society redeemed and purified by the power of Christ through His Church. Jesus in the church of His own village of Nazareth opened the Book of the Prophet Isaias and read, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and re-

covering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." "This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears."

This day, in this twentieth century, if the Church responds to the ideals of her children, this Scripture will continue to be fulfilled by the power of Christ. No true Christian can doubt that it is the Church's work to follow the steps of Christ as He healed, uplifted and purified the people; aye, more, as He stood for social righteousness, for justice and for the rights of the down-trodden as against the indifference or hardness of the men of power.

That there is rising up in this Church a feeling, blind, ignorant, emotional if you will, but earnest, true and sympathetic, that the Church must reach out with a stronger hand, a warmer heart and a firmer voice in behalf of social righteousness, is ground for hope. Every man and woman must rejoice in it. The only question of difference is as to how the Church shall do the work.

First and without question the Church through her worship and preaching is bound to send her children back to their homes,

their private and public duties, with a conviction that as members of Christ's Church they have some definite responsibilities for the community, and it is for them to discover what they are and to meet them. The Church cannot be less than a source of inspiration and of impulse for action. In the broken bread and poured out wine is the power of sacrifice.

Let it be known throughout the length and breadth of the Church that Church membership involves of necessity a sense of responsibility for the welfare of the whole people. Let it be known that the condemnations of Christ fell not with the greatest severity upon the public sinner or the outcast, but upon the respectable members of society and of the Church, who laid burdens and would not lift a finger to lighten them, upon the useless, the selfish, the indifferent. His condemnation was, "Inasmuch as ye did not."

Let it be known throughout the Church that there are thousands of men and women who, because of the Church's lethargy in centuries past as well as to-day, shun or hate the Church, but who adore the

Christ, who are giving of their very life for their fellows and putting us to shame. This country with its spiritual liberty and no favors to any church gives us the chance to show those who come to us from other lands what a Christian Church may be.

Let the members of the Church appreciate more keenly that the masses of men, women and children who are hidden in the intricate mechanisms of this industrial age in the mines, the mills and workshops, out upon the prairies and the lonely valleys, are really men, women and children for whom Christ gave His life.

It is most pathetic the way in which men and women, estranged from the Church, and bitter against society, turn to the Church when in a just and merciful man or a loving woman they really understand what the Christian Church is for.

Ecclesiastical councils, indeed all legislative bodies, are tempted to concentrate their time on certain ideals or reforms while the causes that are pulling down the ideals and preventing the reforms are unnoticed. How many days have our Conventions consumed in legislation upon marriage and divorce

while the Church has been solemnizing the marriages of men and women whose past habits will with almost certainty lead to divorce; and while influences about the youth of the country have been tempting them to undue excitement, unwise liberty, loss of self-control, and impurity, which is sure to reap its harvest of divorce and to degrade ideals of marriage many times faster than ecclesiastical or civil legislation can uplift them. I believe that the strongest appeal that the Church can make to the people, the most effective call to the ablest young men to her ministry, is by such devotion to the welfare of the people as will show them that the Church is alive to the spirit of her Master, Christ.

In the turmoil of industrialism, in the mingling of sin and righteousness, of lust and purity, of selfishness and self-sacrifice, of commercialism and sweet thoughtfulness, let the Church's voice be strong and full of hope. In the strong march of men throughout the world toward a finer civilization, a common justice, a better chance for everybody, and a purer brotherhood, in the advance toward God's kingdom, let not

vested interests or a selfish timidity check our step, but wherever the path of truth and justice points the way, let the Church and every member thereof march in the van.

Thus from the midst of a people, educated, matured in Christian thought and character, these three visions rise and stand—a Brotherhood of Man, a United Church and a redeemed society.

Two words more and I am done

First, in the vast material resources of to-day and the intensity of life the battle is being quickly fought out as to whether the material or the spiritual will dominate. Shall we run the course of other nations and fall under the impact of wealth; or shall we use our wealth for the uplifting of the people?

The answer is with the Christian Church. Have we, shall we have, the faith in God so saturated with His Spirit that it will touch and kindle men's courage and drive through great obstacles; that it will make great ventures and appeal to men's imagination?

Will the Christians of this coming generation be so possessed of spiritual forces as to compel by a spiritual compulsion the

powers of wealth, commerce and statecraft to be the instruments of God's will, and so build up a civilization great, rich and noble?

Faith and faith only can guide and master our resources and win the victory for the spirit.

Second: the Spirit of Christ is here now, as in the councils of old, if in humility and faith we will receive Him. With Christ here and each of us consecrated, we may act with courage. Our faces are forward: our work is for to-morrow, for the years so quick upon us.

"And here we offer and present unto Thee, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice."

O God, accept our consecration.

